

## E-MAIL ANSWERING AGENT

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### ABSTRACT

10 The present invention is answering agent accessible at an e-mail destination  
address. The answering agent waits for e-mail messages to be delivered  
that have a "To:" header and a "Subject:" header. The "To:" header is filled-  
in by a user and has two halves, a topic half and a domain name half in the  
form of "topic@domain-name". The answering agent logically resides at the  
corresponding domain-name address on a network, e.g., the Internet. It  
extracts the source addresses of e-mail messages it receives so that it knows  
where to return answers and where a database of preferences might be  
15 indexed locally. The topic refers to an area of information that the user has a  
question about. The "Subject:" header is filled-in by the user with a qualifier  
that helps narrow down the breadth of the user's inquiry. A finite set of  
topical areas are accessible to the user through the answering agent. A  
database and the Internet itself are data-mined for current information and  
20 the locations of information that could be used to answer users' questions.  
The answering agent, in effect, converts e-mail format queries for information  
into standard browser websearches and collects the answers to the  
questions. The questions can be anticipated and the answers placed in a  
cache, or the questions can be researched automatically in real-time.